

## How to End “The Game” Escaping the Drama Triangle

By David Emerald

This past weekend I had the “growth opportunity” of experiencing first-hand a breakdown in a most important relationship. We both struggled with the downward spiral of what Dr. Stephen Karpman describes as the Drama Triangle (DT) and the all-too-familiar dynamic of “Victim! Victim! Who’s the Victim?”

In this “game,” as Transactional Analysis calls such a dynamic between individuals, both parties lay claim to the victim role and react to the other as the persecutor. Both feel victimized as the game plays out and both want a rescuer to emerge to end the game and, often, to declare who is to blame for the breakdown and who is the “legitimate heir” to the mantle of victim. Because our relationship is so important to us, our question became: “How to break the cycle?”

One insight that arose from the breakdown and subsequent exploration was that explaining and justifying one’s actions and perspective tends to actually perpetuate the drama triangle. Instead, we found what seems to help is owning one’s contribution to the breakdown and to acknowledge this. Reviewing the sequence of events from the perspective of “what I did to contribute” – rather than “what you did to make me react/feel bad” – can be useful in identifying what behaviors and patterns arose.

Once the behaviors are identified, along with the DT role(s) from which they came, we then have the possibility of choosing to make the shift into The Empowerment Dynamic (TED). I have identified these outcome-oriented choices and actions as the roles of creator, challenger and coach, each highlighted in *The Power of TED\** (*\*The Empowerment Dynamic*).

We can shift from the role of victim to that of a creator by speaking to what we want to create and from persecutor to challenger by shifting from an intention to look good or “be right” to speaking from an intention of learning and growth for both parties. We can also break the cycle by shifting into the role of coach (rather than Rescuer) and ask questions that help identify what we want to create and/or learn.

Breaking the cycle by owning our contribution and making the shift is a process that is useful in all aspects of life and relationships: at work, at home, and in our communities. To do so is to call for an effective and empowering end to the drama triangle “game” and the beginning of speaking to the outcomes and intentions that strengthen our relationships.